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Review of *No Place Like Home: Notes from a Western Life* by Linda M. Hasselstrom

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No Place Like Home: Notes from a Western Life.
By Linda M. Hasselstrom. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2009. x + 211 pp. \$24.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

What's happening to Linda Hasselstrom's Great Plains is happening everywhere, even in western Maine, where New Yorkers migrate north, buying second houses in communities once home to lobstermen, farmers, and lumberjacks, changing the face of the social, political, and natural landscape. It's enough to make a person, well, want to let off some steam, and perhaps try to come to some conclusions about what is happening to land and community in America in general and in the Great Plains in particular, which is what Hasselstrom does in her newest work of nonfiction. In this collection of linked essays, she returns to the ranch

in Hermosa, South Dakota, where she grew up, unsurprised that it has changed from a ranching community to a splintered landscape of subdivisions and ranchettes. One of the questions she chases in this work is whether those new community members, those second-home owners, those investors, ever will form real community. Will they join a church, contribute to the volunteer fire department, help on the fire line? The book is first about this, the creation of community in an era when community seems to be splitting itself like multiply-shattered atoms, and second, amidst this wave of disconnection of people from land and each other, about how to find one's home.

These issues, and Hasselstrom's trademark feisty intelligence and humor, are forcefully driven home in the essay "Selling the Ranch," in which Hasselstrom attends the auction of a ranch whose owner recently died. It is achingly obvious that no one at the auction can afford to buy the ranch to work as a living ranch, so the auctioneer is trying to sell it as real estate property that will no doubt be subdivided. The problem, Hasselstrom explains, is that the price of grassland is no longer tied to a ranching economy but to a tourist and real estate economy. When the land is sold it is sold for its "highest use"—which is not grazing cows. No one can afford to ranch anymore. "The people in the house will eat beef raised somewhere else," she remarks wryly.

"Like most western landowners I'm choking on options for the future of this land," Hasselstrom writes. Those options include conservation easements, prairie biospheres, bison preserves, and more. She acknowledges that she must consider the human future of the land, but like the coyote, the mountain lion, and the bobcat, she says, she's a survivor of the Plains, and she and these and other "grizzled beasts" still "appreciate the land for what it is, not as real estate."

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